

An impressionist painting featuring a tree on the right side, with its branches extending towards the center. The background is a mix of blue, green, and yellow, suggesting a body of water and foliage. The style is characterized by visible brushstrokes and a focus on light and color.

# FRENCH IMPRESSIONISM AND POST-IMPRESSIONISM

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## FORESIGHTED COLLECTING

The Museum's collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings owes much to perceptive and foresighted acquisitions made at a time when such works of art did not enjoy the popular acceptance they do today. It was appropriate that Manet's *Portrait of Antonin Proust*, the first major Impressionist painting to come to the Museum, should have been given by the Museum's founder Edward Drummond Libbey in 1925. This significant painting was soon followed by important acquisitions made possible after Mr. Libbey's death in 1926 by his generous bequest. The first painting to be acquired from these funds in 1928 was *The Dancers* by Edgar Degas. Six months later in 1929, the second painting acquired from Libbey funds was the Museum's beautiful view of *Antibes* by Claude Monet. These two masterpieces and *Peasants Resting* by Camille Pissarro, acquired in 1935, have the special distinction of having been in the private collection of Paul Durand-Ruel. Paul Durand-Ruel was the Parisian art dealer who first discovered and loyally supported the Impressionists during their difficult early years. From the hun-

dreds of paintings that passed through his gallery he selected the finest of each artist for his own collection.

By 1935, the Museum had acquired *The Wheat Field* and *Houses at Auvers* by van Gogh, *The Green Jardinière* by Renoir, and *In the Garden at Maurecourt* by Berthe Morisot. These, in addition to several other Impressionist paintings, formed the foundation for the Museum's fine representative Impressionist and Post-Impressionist collections.

With this strong beginning, the Museum has through generous gifts by individuals such as Mr. and Mrs. William E. Levis and Mrs. C. Lockhart McKelvy and through purchase, enlarged its collection. All examples illustrated, unless otherwise designated, have been acquired by the Museum with funds bequeathed to it by Edward Drummond Libbey.

This publication illustrates a part of the Museum's collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art, with appropriate comments by the artists and their contemporaries.

Otto Wittmann  
Director

Cover:  
CLAUDE MONET (1840-1926).  
Detail, *Antibes*, 1881  
(full composition illustrated on p. 67).



# FRENCH IMPRESSIONISM AND POST-IMPRESSIONISM

EDOUARD MANET (1832-1883).  
Detail, *Portrait of Antonin Proust*, 1880 (full  
composition illustrated on p. 65).  
Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 1925.



"French Impressionist Painting" brings to mind certain well known hallmarks. Scenes of everyday life on the Parisian boulevards, in parks, theatres, cafés, domestic interiors and race tracks during the 1870's and 1880's are revealed in a light-filled atmosphere. Artists painted out-of-doors, "en plein air," and sought out landscapes in Normandy or Provence. The shimmering effects of light affected by the moist atmosphere of the northern coast or the pure brilliant colors of the Côte d'Azur seemed particularly suited to the Impressionist interest. Clearly evident brushstrokes of pure color

were juxtaposed to produce sparkling effects of light and atmosphere. The visual reality, the "impression" of a thing as seen, was that which the artist sought to record on his canvas. One might also say of Impressionism that the reality of the artist was the painted surface. The gloves in the *Portrait of Antonin Proust* by Manet are not cloth, they are paint, and this aspect assumed a rôle of primary importance to the Impressionist painter.

Although we have come to group Manet, Monet, Renoir, and Degas together, each of these and the other so-called Impressionists had his own spe-





EDGAR DEGAS (1834-1917).  
*Study in Nude for Dressed Ballet Dancer*, wax figure  
 1870-1880, bronze 1919-1921.  
 Bronze, height 28½ inches.  
 Acquired, 1950.

cific vision, interests, and methods. Degas never painted out-of-doors, preferring the artificial light and the disciplined postures of the ballet, for example. He believed in precise, selective draughtsmanship rather than in recording a visual impressionism. Carefully calculated structure underlay each Degas composition. Manet stopped exhibiting with the other Impressionist painters in 1874, and, feeling a stronger need for official approval, sought the recognition of prevailing Academic taste by exhibiting in the biennial Salon. Late in his painting career Manet became interested in the atmospheric effects so important to Monet and Renoir. His earlier forthright manner differed entirely in intention and effect from the soft romantic world and the resplendent colors of Renoir. Within the work of one artist, there were marked changes of style. Pissarro worked for a substantial part of his career with visual effects of light and color. However, he executed a few canvases in a bold severe technique. The Toledo *Still Life* (illustrated p. 67) is from this period.

Some artists who emerged after the Impressionists, and employed certain of their tenets, have been called the Post-Impressionists. Among these are van Gogh, Gauguin and Signac. All of these artists worked briefly with certain aspects of the Impressionist painters' discoveries, but soon they moved on to explore personal interests and new possibilities. The rich pictorial architecture of Cézanne is far removed from the brilliant colors and swirling distortions in the intense expressions of van Gogh. The pristine, calculated poetry of form and points of color whose organization was based on new scientific theories in the painting of Seurat and Signac is worlds apart from the elemental emotions explored by Gauguin in his paintings of the primitive Tahitian culture.

The large number and the range of artistic talents which are included in the period of French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism have few parallels in art history. This flowering in the tradition of French painting was revolutionary and was also to be the basis for the innovations of 20th century painting in Europe and America.

Katharine C. Lee  
 Assistant Curator





EDOUARD MANET (1832-1883).

*Portrait of Antonin Proust (1832-1905), 1880.*

Oil on canvas, 51 x 37 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches.

Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 1925.

For three weeks now, your portrait has been at the Salon, badly hung on a cut panel near a door, and criticized still worse. But it is my fate to be vilified, and I accept it philosophically. Nevertheless, my dear friend, you would hardly believe how difficult it is to place a figure alone on a canvas, and to concentrate all the interest on this single and unique figure and still keep it living and real. To paint two figures which get their interest from the duality of the two personalities is child's play in comparison. Ah, the portrait with a hat on, which, one said, was all in blue! . . . But after my time they will recognize that I saw and thought with exactness. I remember as if it were yesterday the quick and summary manner in which I treated the glove in the ungloved hand. And when at that instant you said to me, "Please, not a line more," I felt that we were in such perfect accord that I could not resist the impulse to embrace you. . . .

*Edouard Manet, 1880*

From a letter to Antonin Proust in which Manet refers to the *Portrait of Antonin Proust*. See Antonin Proust, *Souvenirs d'Edouard Manet*, Paris, 1913, pp. 102-103.





EUGÈNE BOUDIN (1824-1898).  
*On the Beach at Trouville*, 1865.  
 Oil on wood panel, 13 $\frac{5}{8}$  x 22 $\frac{5}{8}$  inches.  
 Acquired, 1951.

Twenty times I have begun again in order to approach the delicacy, the charm of the light that plays everywhere. How fresh it is! It is soft, faded, rose-tinted. . . . There are nothing but tones everywhere. The sea was superb; the sky was soft, velvety. It then changed to yellow; it became warm; then the setting sun gave beautiful violet nuances to everything; the earth, the breakwaters also took on this hue.

*Eugène Boudin, about 1854-1859*

From William C. Seitz, *Claude Monet, Seasons and Moments*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1960, p. 4.

JOHANN BARTHOLD JONGKIND (1819-18-91),  
 Dutch.  
*Honfleur Harbor*, 1863.  
 Oil on canvas, 13 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 18 $\frac{1}{4}$  inches.  
 Acquired, 1950.

(Jongkind) asked to see my sketches, invited me to come and work with him, explained to me the why and the wherefore of his manner and thereby completed the teaching that I had already received from Boudin. From that time he was my real master; it was to him that I owe the final education of my eye.

*Monet speaking about Jongkind, 1901*

From an interview published in *Le Temps*, November, 1901 quoted in John Rewald, *The History of Impressionism*, New York, 1961, pp. 69-70.







CLAUDE MONET (1840-1926).  
*Antibes*, 1888.  
 Oil on canvas, 29½ x 36½ inches.  
 Acquired, 1929.

Last year . . . I often followed Claude Monet in his search of impressions. He was no longer a painter, in truth, but a hunter. He proceeded, followed by children who carried his canvases, five or six canvases representing the same subject at different times of day and with different effects.

He took them up and put them aside in turn, following the changes in the sky. And the painter, before his subject, lay in wait for the sun and shadows, capturing in a few brushstrokes the ray that fell or the cloud that passed. . . .

I have seen him thus seize a glittering shower of light on the white cliff and fix it in a flood of yellow tones that, strangely, rendered the surprising and fugitive effect of that unseizable and dazzling brilliance. On another occasion he took a downpour beating on the sea in his hands and dashed it on the canvas—and indeed it was the rain that he had thus painted. . . .

*Guy de Maupassant, 1886*

From Guy de Maupassant, "La vie d'un paysagiste," *Oeuvres posthumes*, Paris, September 28, 1886.





BERTHE MORISOT (1841-1895).  
*In the Garden at Maurecourt*, 1884 (detail above, full  
 composition below).  
 Oil on canvas, 21 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 25 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches.  
 Acquired, 1930.

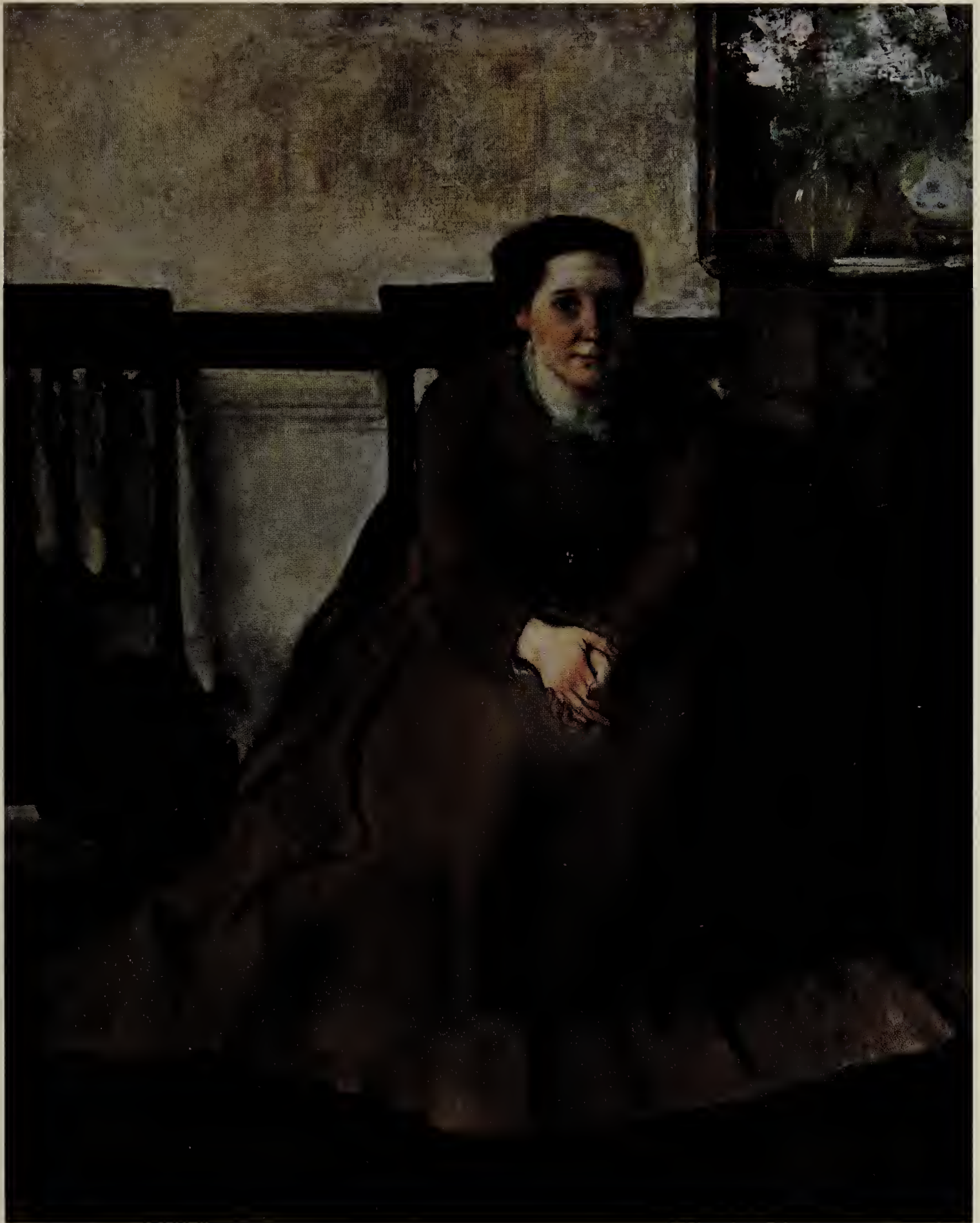
One dashes about and fusses; one no longer  
 realizes that nothing is more important than a  
 couple of hours stretched out on a hammock; life  
 is a dream and the dream is more true than reality  
 —there one is oneself, really oneself. If one does  
 have a soul, that is where it is to be found.

*Berthe Morisot, 1881*

From *Berthe Morisot*, introduction by Elizabeth Mongan, New York, 1960,  
 p. 16.







EDGAR DEGAS (1834-1917).  
*Mlle. Victoria Dubourg* (a painter of still life and  
portraits as was her husband Fantin Latour),  
1867-1868.  
Oil on canvas, 32 x 25½ inches.  
Acquired, 1963.





EDGAR DEGAS (1834-1917).

*The Dancers*, 1899.

Pastel on paper, mounted on board, 24½ x 25½  
inches.

Acquired, 1928.

A picture is something which requires as much knavery, trickery, and deceit as the perpetration of a crime. Paint falsely, and then add the accent of nature.

The artist does not draw what he sees, but what he must make others see. Only when he no longer knows what he is doing does the painter do good things.

A picture is first of all a product of the imagination of the artist; it must never be a copy. . . . The air we see in the paintings of the old masters is never the air we breathe.

*Edgar Degas*

From *Artists on Art*, edited by Robert Goldwater and Marco Treves, New York, 1945, p. 308.





PAUL CÉZANNE (1839-1906).  
*Allée at Chantilly*, 1888.  
 Oil on canvas, 32 x 25½ inches.  
 Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William E. Levis, 1959.

May I repeat what I told you here: treat nature by the cylinder, the sphere, the cone, everything in proper perspective so that each side of an object or a plane is directed towards a central point. . . . But nature for us men is more depth than surface whence the need of introducing into our light vibrations, represented by reds and yellows, a sufficient amount of blue to give the impression of air.

*Paul Cézanne, 1904*

From *Paul Cézanne Letters*, edited by John Rewald, Oxford, 1946. p. 234.





PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR (1841-1919).  
*Road at Wargemont*, 1879.  
Oil on canvas, 31 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 39 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches.  
Acquired, 1957.

How difficult it is to find the exact stage at which a painting should stop in its imitation of nature. What is necessary is that you get the very 'feel' of the subject. A picture is not a catalogue. I love pictures which make me want to stroll around in them, if they are landscapes, or to caress them, if they are women.

*Pierre-Auguste Renoir*





PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR (1841-1919).  
*The Washerwoman*, 1919.  
Bronze, height 48¼ x length 51 inches.  
Acquired, 1950.

... one day when I was ... looking for one of those wine shops where beef and chips are served, I stopped, carried away with delight before the "Fontaine des Innocents" (Fountain of the Innocents) by Jean Gougon, which I had not seen before. I gave up the bistro, bought a bit of sausage ... and spent my hour of liberty walking around the fountain from all sides ... what purity, what simplicity, what elegance, and at the same time what solidity. ...

... when I was a youngster I went often to the sculpture galleries of the Louvre, hardly knowing why ... I stayed there for hours, day-dreaming.

*Pierre-Auguste Renoir*





PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR (1841-1919).  
*The Green Jardinière*, 1882, completed in 1912  
 (detail above, full composition below).  
 Oil on canvas, 36½ x 27 inches.  
 Acquired, 1933.

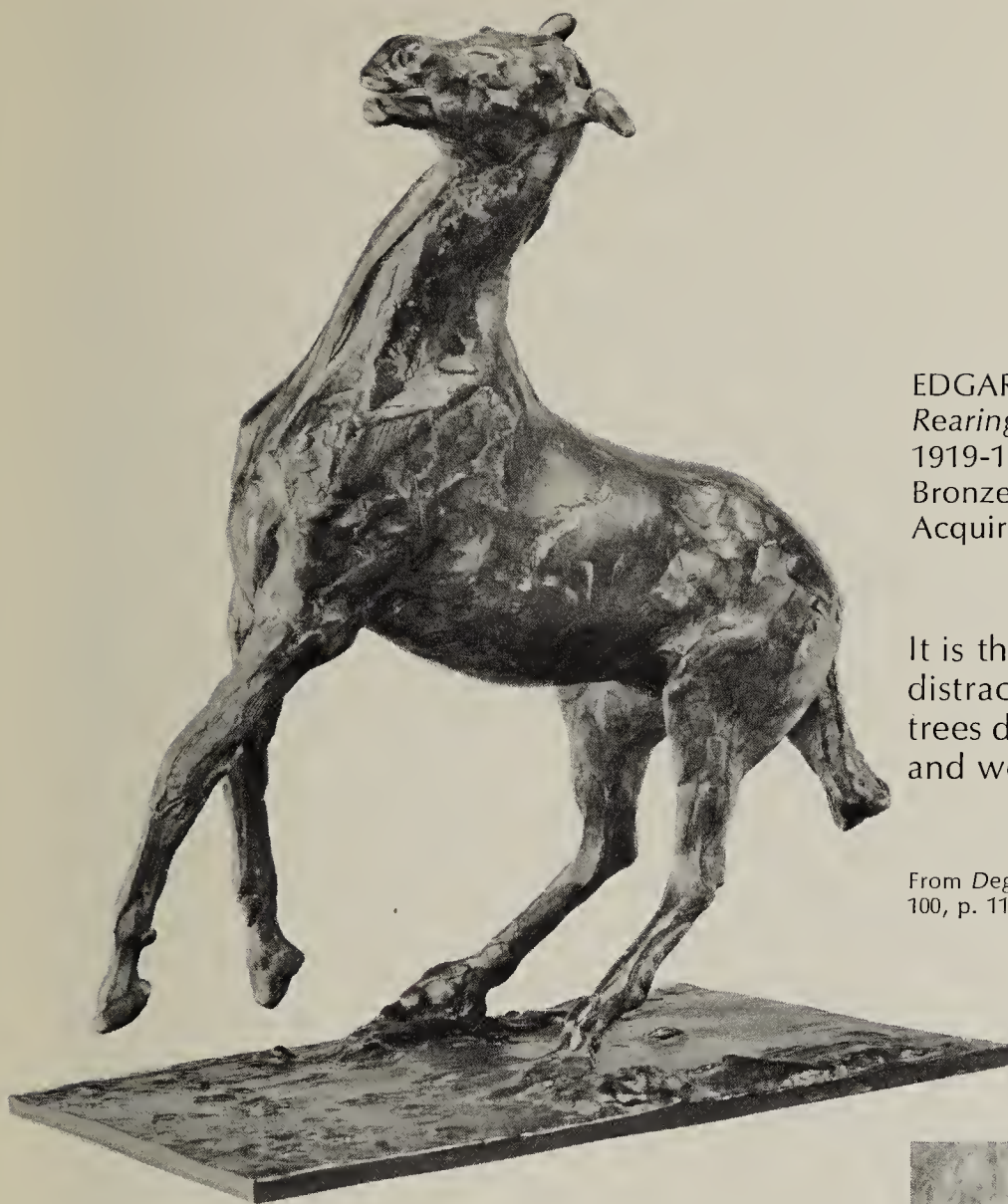


I arrange my subject as I want it, then I go ahead and paint it, like a child. . . . I have no rules and no methods; anyone can look at my materials or watch how I paint—he will see that I have no secrets. I look at a . . . (figure); there are myriads of tiny tints. I must find the ones that will make the flesh on my canvas live and quiver. Nowadays they want to explain everything. But if they could explain a picture, it wouldn't be art. . . .

*Pierre-Auguste Renoir, about 1908*

From Walter Pach, *Pierre-Auguste Renoir*, New York, 1950, p. 29.





EDGAR DEGAS (1834-1917).  
*Rearing Horse*, wax figure 1870-1880; bronze  
 1919-1921.  
 Bronze, height 12 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches.  
 Acquired, 1952.

It is the movement of people and things that  
 distracts and even consoles. . . . If the leaves of the  
 trees did not move, how sad the trees would be  
 and we too!

*Edgar Degas, 1886*

From *Degas Letters*, edited by Marcel Guerin, Oxford, 1948, letter number  
 100, p. 117.



PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR (1841-1919).  
*Bather*, 1912.  
 Oil on canvas, 25 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 22 inches.  
 Gift of Mrs. C. Lockhart McKelvy, 1955.





ALFRED SISLEY (1839-1899).  
*The Aqueduct at Marly*, 1874.  
 Oil on canvas, 21 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 32 inches.  
 Acquired, 1951.

It is a ticklish thing to put down on paper what a painter calls his aesthetic. . . .

The animation of the canvas is one of the hardest problems of painting. To give life to the work of art is certainly one of the most necessary tasks of the true artist. Everything must serve this end: form, color, surface. The artist's impression is the life-giving factor, and only this impression can be free of the spectator. . . .

Objects must be portrayed in their particular context, and they must especially be bathed in light, as is the case of nature. The progress to be realized in the future will consist in this. The means will be the sky (the sky can never be merely a background). Not only does it give the picture depth through its successive planes (for the sky, like the ground, has its planes), but through its form, and through its relations with the whole effect or with the composition of the picture, it gives it movement. . . .

*Alfred Sisley*





PAUL SIGNAC (1863-1935).  
*Venice*, 1905.  
 Oil on canvas, 28 $\frac{15}{16}$  x 36 $\frac{1}{4}$  inches.  
 Acquired, 1952.

I attach more and more importance to the purity of each brushstroke and I try to give each its maximum of intensity and purity. All blurring and rubbing which muddies it displeases me. . . . Each time that my stroke chances to overlap another which is not dry and the resulting tone is impure, I experience a physical disgust! It is the devotion to beautiful color that causes us to paint this way . . . and not a taste for dots as some fools say.

*Paul Signac, 1884*

From *La Creation de l'oeuvre chez Paul Signac*, London, Marlborough Fine Arts Limited, 1958, p. 47 (translation by Katharine Lee).





VINCENT VAN GOGH (1853-1890).  
*The Wheat Field, June, 1888.*  
Oil on canvas, 29 x 36 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches.  
Acquired, 1935.

... nature here (in Arles) is so extraordinarily beautiful. Everywhere and all over the vault of heaven is a marvelous blue, and the sun sheds a radiance of pale sulphur, and it is soft and as lovely as the combination of heavenly blues and yellows in a Vermeer. I cannot paint it as beautifully as that, but it absorbs me so much that I let myself go, never thinking of a single rule.

*Vincent van Gogh, 1888*

From *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, Greenwich, Connecticut,  
1959, Volume III, letter number 539, p. 42.





VINCENT VAN GOGH (1853-1890).  
*Houses at Auvers, June, 1890.*  
Oil on canvas, 23 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 28 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches.  
Acquired, 1935.

Is it not emotion, the sincerity of one's feeling for nature, that draws us, and if the emotions are sometimes so strong that one works without knowing one works, when sometimes the strokes come with a continuity and a coherence like words in a speech or a letter, then one must remember that it has not always been so, and that in time to come there will again be hard days, empty of inspiration. . . .

*Vincent van Gogh, 1888*

From *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, Greenwich, Connecticut, 1959, Volume II, letter number 504, p. 598.





PAUL GAUGUIN (1848-1903).  
*Street in Tahiti*, 1891.  
 Oil on canvas, 45½ x 34⅞ inches.  
 Acquired, 1939.

In order to explain my Tahitian art, since it is held to be incomprehensible: as I want to suggest an exuberant and wild nature and a tropical sun which set on fire everything around it, I have to give my figures an appropriate frame. It really is open-air life, although initiate; in the thickets and shaded brooks, those whispering women in an immense palace decorated by nature itself with all the riches that Tahiti holds. Hence these fabulous colors and this fiery yet softened and silent air.

But all this does not exist!

Yes, it exists as the equivalent of the grandeur and profundity of this mystery of Tahiti, when it must be expressed on a canvas one meter square.

*Paul Gauguin, about 1898*







